

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

BRYANT AND HIS FRIENDS: Some Reminiscences of the Knickerbocker Writers. By JAMES GRANT WILSON. Pp. 442. Ford, Howard & Hubert.

No man living is probably so well fitted as the author of this volume to sketch the group of Knickerbocker writers who were not so very long ago much more than names, who in their prime seemed to their contemporaries almost equal in talent, yet who have already been classified and divided into categories, of which not all are judged worthy of immortality. General Wilson knew them all, or nearly all, personally. Bryant, Paulding, Irving, Dana, Cooper, Hallieck, Drake, Willis, Poe, Taylor, and the remoter school, Woodworth, Verplanck, Hillhouse, Price, Stone, Clench, Clark, Brooks, Morris, Leggett, Imeson, Hoffman, Osborn, Street, Tuckerman, Duvekirk, Jones, Cozans and White. Some of them lived so long as to connect the end of the last century with the fourth quarter of the present one. Their observation covered a period of veritable revolution in American life and literature. The Knickerbocker writers nourished when New-York was an overgrown village; when it was still possible to know everybody of consequence in the town; when what would now be thought very mild literary efforts produced considerable sensation; when the tendency toward mutual admiration was strong, and but little resisted.

The literary style of that day was formed upon the Adisionian model. It was stately, dignified, slow and diffuse. Ideas were so wrapped up in verbiage that they were apt to seem more important than they were. The prevailing notions of humor were so different from those of to-day that our predecessors' column fun seems to us too ponderous for laughter. Yet there was grace and wit and spirit in the Knickerbocker writings, and some of them remain models of good taste and refined thought. General Wilson has known so many of the old-times celebrities that no doubt it is natural for him to put them all together, though to the younger generation it seems almost a pity not to draw a broader line between the small group of well-founded reputations and the ephemeral swarm of writers who claim posterity already regards with scarcely disguised impatience.

These reminiscences are necessarily fragmentary, but they are specially interesting in that they for the most part record personal experiences of the writer. He relates how he visited Irving, or Dana, or Cooper, or Paulding. He describes their dwellings, their way of living, their domestic predilections. Without any offensive intrusion he lifts a corner of the curtain of privacy just enough to give a momentary glimpse of the individuals. Many of these sketches are very interesting, and the worst fault of all of them is their brevity. Mr. Wilson, the reader feels, has made the mistake of trying to include too many people in his book. Had he restricted the number by one-half, or better still, had he made two volumes instead of one, the value and interest alike would have been much greater. As it is, the sketches are too meager to satisfy the awakened interest. The account of Mr. Bryant is the fullest and best. That of Washington Irving tell too little, and the same may be said of Cooper. The author has a much higher opinion of Nathaniel Parker Willis than many of that poet's contemporaries hold; and perhaps the later judgment may be the sounder.

The book is written with care. In its preparation in the selection of quotations for chapter headings, in the fac-similes, which add value to the biographic sketches, in all the details, one recognizes fidelity to the usages of that older school whose living representatives are now so few. For these reminders of a past which we must regard tenderly and which, for all the self-assertion of the present, has for modern writers many profitable lessons, the author deserves thanks. The relics of the Knickerbockers are not so abundant that we can afford to lose any of them, and this little book is therefore, as well as for its own merit, a welcome publication. It is enriched with several good steel portraits, those of Bryant and Haleck being especially satisfactory.

MR. HOWELL'S THEORY OF FICTION.

To the Editor of The Tribune.

SIR: Mr. Howells, in his new department in Harper's Monthly, records his opinions on several works of fiction, and some of these strike me as so strange that I am moved to solicit space enough to discuss them a little in your columns. While praising Miss Murfee's story, "The Prophet of the Great Smoky Mountains," Mr. Howells cites a poetical passage from it to point an uncomplimentary reference to whom. It is not quite clear, though the tendency of the criticism is evident.

"We know," he says, "who she left him that had done business with the great master as that, having done a fine thing abandoned him to prefer his emotionalities over it, or what people call 'sympathy' with his characters," and presently wanders off into a waste of hollow and sounding verbiage. The presumption is that Dickens is here meant, though from the fact that he is introduced by name in the following sentence, and in a peculiar manner, some may feel uncertain about this. Mr. Howells proceeds: We have some fear, also, that Dickens, with his Victor Hugo martyr of a Sidney Carton was not wholly absent when the last end of Miss Murfee's "Prophet" was unmasked.

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